

who have supported this effort here in Maryland.

I also want to say this—I said this before—there are a lot of children in America whose parents weren't born here, a lot of children in America who themselves weren't born here, but there is no child in America who can't meet these standards. I believe all children can learn, don't you? Don't you believe all your classmates can learn?

Students. Yes!

The President. Don't you believe, if you get the help you need and if you work at it, you can learn what you need to know to make a success of your life?

Students. Yes!

The President. And don't you think you have a right to get the kind of education that will let you go as far as your dreams want?

Students. Yes!

The President. I do, too. And that's what this is about.

So I want to make sure all of our children are treated fairly. I want to make sure that all of them have the tools they need to achieve what they need to achieve. But I have found what I see here: When you expect high achievement from students, they always give it to you. And when you have low expectations of people, that's a mistake.

So I believe in you, and I believe in your future. These tests that we propose to give are voluntary. No school or school district will be forced to use them if they don't want to. But they will give us a sense of a national level of achievement in reading for fourth graders, in math for eighth graders. They'll be developed by an independent, bipartisan board. There's no politics in this, only our children.

But let me say this in closing, I'm not afraid of what America's children can do. I believe in what America's children can do. I'm not disturbed by the fact that we're becoming a more diverse country. I'm excited by it. After all, we're going to be living in a global society where we'll be tied to other nations by economic and cultural ties. And the fact that America is a great democracy that has people from everywhere else living here, as citizens, making their own way, is a good thing.

I imagine this student body here looks a little different than it would have if we'd had this picture taken 10 years ago. That's a good thing. We should be happy about our differences. But no matter how different we are, we all need to be able to read; we all need to be able to do math; we all need to be able to learn together. I am determined to see that you have a good future. But you have to do your part, which is to learn. And the only way you can do that is if your parents and the educators say, "Here is the standard. Here's what you should be learning."

I believe in your future. I have high expectations for you, and I see today that you believe in your future. Do you believe all children can learn to read?

Students. Yes!

The President. Do you think that all children should be expected to learn to read well?

Students. Yes!

The President. Would you like us to find out, so that if somebody is not reading well, we can teach them to read well?

Students. Yes!

The President. It would be unfair to leave somebody behind, wouldn't it?

Students. Yes!

The President. That's what I think, too. You keep reading, and we'll keep working. Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:20 a.m. in the media center. In his remarks, he referred to Jonathan Knobel, fifth-grade student who introduced the President, and Lorna Leone, principal, Four Seasons Elementary School; and Gov. Parris Glendening and Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend of Maryland.

Proclamation 7018—America Goes Back to School, 1997

September 8, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Americans want the best for our children. We want them to live out their dreams, empowered with the tools they need to make the most of their lives and to build a future

where America remains the world's beacon of hope and freedom and opportunity. To do this, we must all make improving the quality of education in America one of our highest priorities.

In my State of the Union Address earlier this year, I issued a call to action for American education to prepare our Nation for the 21st century. Working together, we must make our schools strong and safe, with clear standards of achievement and discipline and talented, dedicated teachers in every classroom. Every school and every State should adopt rigorous national standards, with national tests in 4th-grade reading and 8th-grade math to make sure our children master the basics. We must ensure that every student can read independently and well by the end of the 3rd grade. We must connect every classroom and library to the Internet by the year 2000 and help all students become technologically literate. We must modernize school buildings and expand school choice and accountability in public education. And we must encourage lifelong learning for all our citizens, from expanding Head Start programs to helping adults improve their education and skills.

These goals are ambitious, but they are crucial if we are to prepare for the challenges and possibilities of life in the 21st century. With the 1997 balanced budget agreement, we will begin to meet these goals by providing new resources to help children learn to read, the means to help connect every school to the Internet, and tens of billions of dollars in tax cuts to help families pay for college.

I urge all Americans to become actively involved in their local schools and colleges and to make a real commitment to support education improvement and give our children the kind of support they need to succeed. The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education is setting a powerful example in this endeavor. These partners—including the Department of Education and more than 3,000 schools, families, colleges and universities, community, cultural, and religious groups, businesses, elected officials and policymakers, and the men and women of our Armed Forces—have pledged their support for our initiative, "America Goes Back to School: Answering the President's

Call to Action." Through their dedication to our children, they are helping America's young people grow into responsible and productive citizens. They are proving that when communities unite, every student can achieve more.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim September 8 through September 14, 1997, as a time when America Goes Back to School. I encourage parents, schools, community and State leaders, businesses, civic and religious organizations, and the people of the United States to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies and activities expressing support for high academic standards and meaningful involvement in schools and colleges and the students and families they serve.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this eighth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-second.

William J. Clinton

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., September 10, 1997]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on September 11.

Remarks at American University *September 9, 1997*

Thank you very much. First, thank all of you for that wonderful welcome. I told President Ladner that after you gave me such a buoyant welcome, I really didn't want to speak. I thought I should quit while I was ahead. [Laughter]

I appreciate the president's welcome and his profound words. I thank Neal Sharma for his introduction and for his leadership here among the students. To Chairman Jacobs and Professor Mintz, Secretary and Mrs. Dalton, City Councilman Thomas; to all the trustees and alumni and faculty and staff and students who are here, and the friends of American University who are here.